**#CdnImm Event #5: Refugee Issues and Legislation**

July 5, 2012 | 1-4 pm | North York Central Library Auditorium

Organizers: North York Community House (Rabia Din) and OCASI (Doug Bastien)

Welcome / Introduction

Doug Bastien from OCASI welcomed all participants and provided a general introduction, discussing the rationale, importance and benefits of #CdnImm events and reviewing the topics covered at previous events.

Introduction of Speakers

Adnan Admin of North York Community House (NYCH) introduced the guest speakers, both from FCJ Refugee Centre: **Loly Rico** (co-founder) and **Philip Ackerman** (research and youth network coordinator). FCJ’s other co-founder, Franciso Rico-Martinez, was unable to attend.

Presentation

Having been in Canada for 22 years after arriving as a Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR), Loly described the period of 2008-2012 as one of **unprecedented change in federal immigration policies**. This era of reform corresponds with the appointment of Jason Kenney as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The vast changes being implemented affect all aspects of immigration:

* ministerial roles and powers
* settlement services
* refugees
* economic and family class immigrants
* temporary workers

INTERIM FEDERAL HEALTH PLAN (IFHP)

After providing this context for the current state of affairs of federal immigration policy, the focus of the presentation turned to changes to refugee legislation, beginning with cuts to refugee health care or the Interim Federal Health Plan (IFHP).

Philip began his address by mentioning FCJ’s participation in [Campaign 31](http://www.thestar.com/news/article/1171215--refugee-reform-bill-sparks-grassroots-protests-across-gta), a 31-week vigil to stop Bill C-31 (though the bill has already passed) taking place on Friday evenings at Dufferin Grove Park. He also noted that FCJ has been running symbolic health clinics for refugees affected by the cuts with the help of concerned doctors and the participation of local MP(P)s.

Next came a summary of changes to the IFHP including how they will affect different categories of refugees. A result of dividing refugees into different classes has resulted in some of them being treated as temporary visitors.

One class of refugees will be associated with a yet-to-be-published **Designated Country of Origin (DCO)** list which will determined by ministerial authority, in this case the Minister of Public Safety, rather than a panel of experts and is expected to include approximately 70 countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Mexico.

Loly continued the presentation, highlighting that under the new legislation there will be **better health care for refugees in detention** than those not. Additionally, the emphasis is on **emergency, not preventive, care**.

CHANGES TO THE REFUGEE PROCESS

The next topic covered was changes to the refugee process, changes which the opposition parties had blocked when the government had a minority mandate but which have been brought back by the current majority government. The following are some key changes:

* Refugee Protection Division will have **public servants as decision-makers** rather than Governors in Council (GIC)
* Refugee Appeal Division (newly created) will have GICs (former Immigration and Refugee Board members)
* Some refugee determination decisions will remain subject to judicial review, but only in regards to procedures being followed, not in regards to the merits of a case

There will be **three main categories of refugee claimants**:

* **Regular** claims (216 days to process)
* **DCO** list (60 days to process – no appeal, no stay of removal for judicial review)
* **Designated group (irregular) arrivals** (claims decided in detention, no appeal, removal directly from prison)

In summary, **only some refugee claimants will have the right of appeal**, some could **lose their permanent residence** (applies to all Convention Refugees unless citizens) and the **Source Country program** (formerly available in countries such as Colombia) has been **eliminated**.

Moreover, a **cap has been placed on new applications to the Privately-Sponsored Refugee** (PSR) program and “Group of 5” and community sponsorships are **limited to UNHCR- or state-approved refugees**.

CITIZENSHIP

Loly also discussed implemented and proposed changes to citizenship which will make it harder to obtain.

Implemented changes:

* Harder exam
* No automatic citizenship for foreign-born children of Canadians
* Face must be uncovered during ceremony

Proposed changes:

* Language test
* No automatic citizenship for all babies born in Canada

CONCLUSION / CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT

In light of the government’s law and order agenda, there is an emphasis on **enforcement** in its immigration and refugee policies. The **government’s messaging** portrays refugees seeking asylum from within Canada as less worthy, branding them as “queue jumpers” and “bogus refugees.” The emphasis on enforcement has led to the the humanitarian aspect being forgotten and Canada, once a world leader in its treatment of refugees, has embarked on a markedly different path.

Question and Answer Period

Several questions were fielded and The [59 Cents](http://59cents.org/) campaign was highlighted.

Concluding Remarks

Doug thanked all participants and highlighted future #CdnImm events being planned around the topics of partnerships, mental health, seniors and youth.

**Please see the FCJ PowerPoint Presentation for further details on the changes in policy and legislation and how they will affect different refugee groups.**